Accommodations Toolkit

Noise Reduction: States' Accessibility Policies, 2023

This summary of states' accessibility policies for **noise reduction** is part of the *Accommodations Toolkit* published by the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO)[1]. The toolkit also contains a summary of the research literature on noise reduction (/nceo/accommodations-toolkit/noise-reduction-research).

Accessibility policies often have several tiers of accessibility features: universal features, designated features, and accommodations.[2] Figure 1 summarizes how states included noise reduction in their accessibility policies for students with disabilities in 2023. Figure 2 summarizes how states included noise reduction in their accessibility policies for English learners in 2023. Table 1 shows how noise reduction was included in the policies, while Table 2 contains additional details and specifications.

Figure 1. States' Accessibility Policies for Students with Disabilities for Noise Reduction, 2023

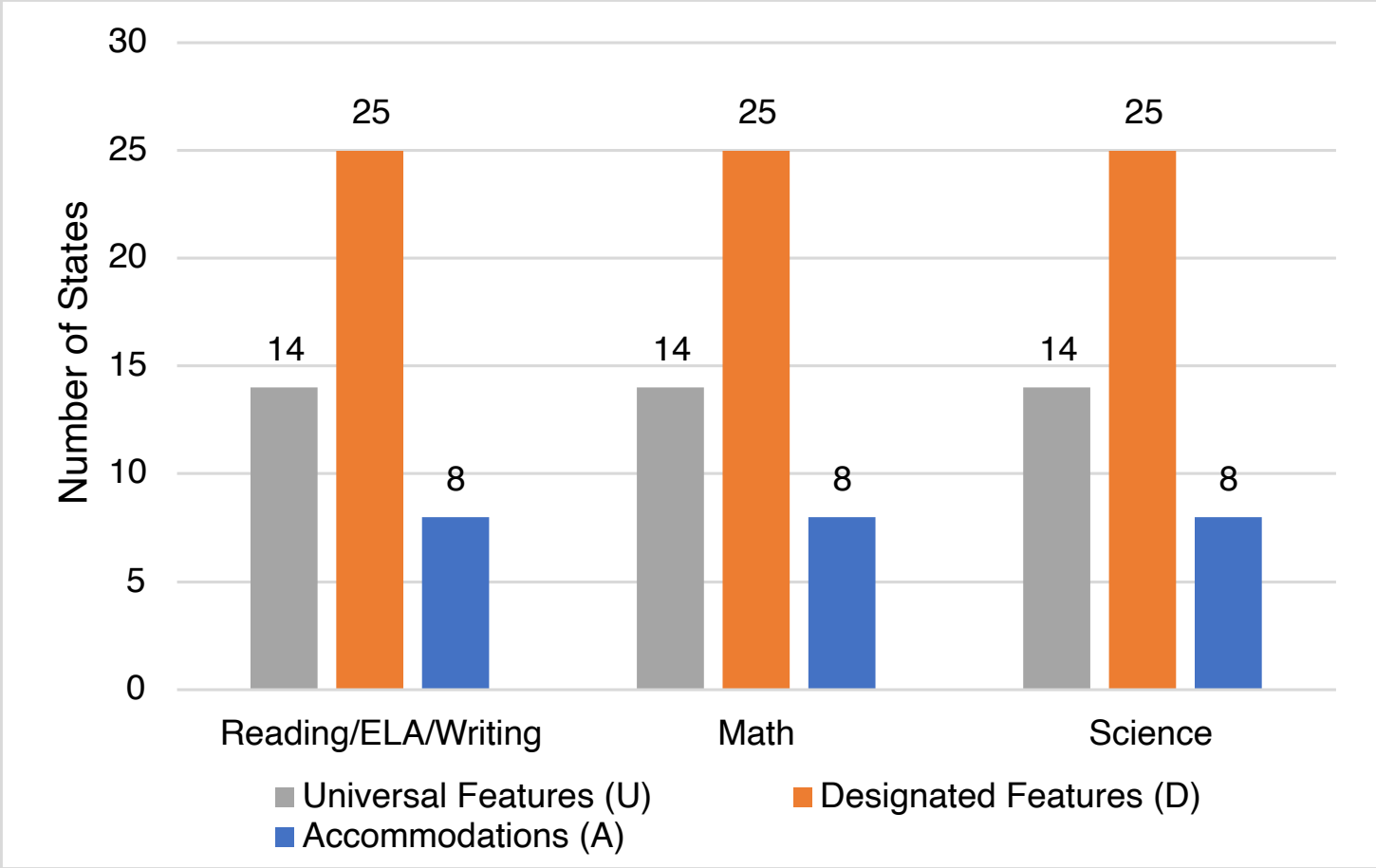

Figure 2. States' Accessibility Policies for English Learners for Noise Reduction, 2023

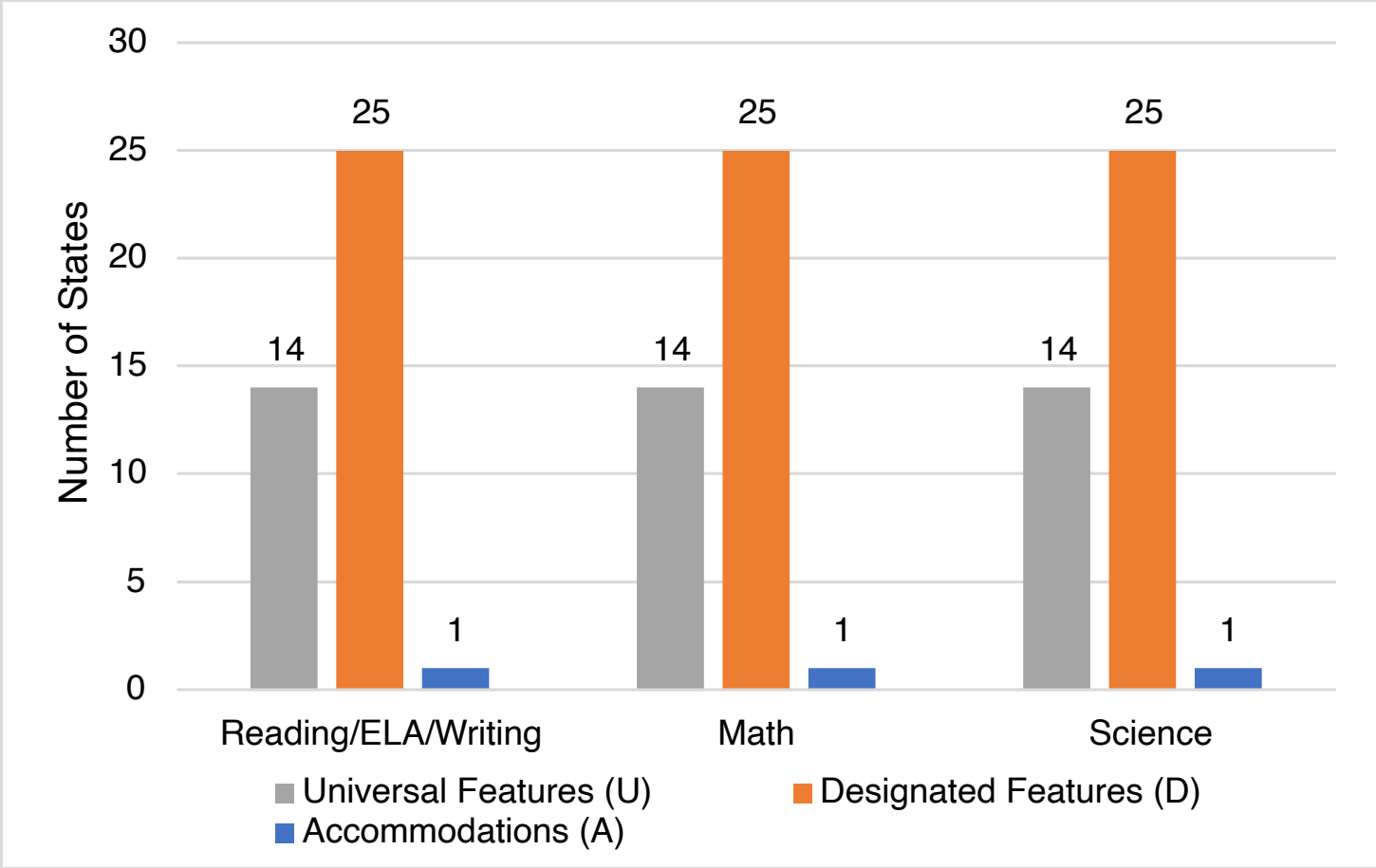

Table 1. Accommodations Policies for Noise Reduction by State, 2023

U = Universal Feature, D = Designated Feature, A = Accommodation, ELA = English Language Arts, X = Allowed, SD =

State	Reading/ELA/Writing			Math	
	U	D	A	U	
Alabama					
Alaska	X			X	
Arizona	X			X	
Arkansas					
California		X			
Colorado		X			
Connecticut		X			
Delaware		X			
District of Columbia		X			

Florida			SD		
Georgia			SD		
Hawaii		X			X
Idaho		X			X
Illinois		X			X
Indiana	X			X	
Iowa	X			X	
Kansas					
Kentucky					
Louisiana	X			X	
Maine		X			X
Maryland		X			X
Massachusetts		X			X
Michigan		X			X

Minnesota	X			X	
Mississippi	X			X	
Missouri	X			X	
Montana		X			X
Nebraska	X			X	
Nevada		X			X
New Hampshire		X			X
New Jersey		X			X
New Mexico			SD		
New York			SD		
North Carolina		X			X
North Dakota		X			X
Ohio		X			X

Oklahoma			SD		
Oregon		X			X
Pennsylvania			SD		
Rhode Island	X			X	
South Carolina	X			X	
South Dakota		X			X
Tennessee	X			X	
Texas		X			X
Utah	X			X	
Vermont		X			X
Virginia			SD		
Washington		X			X
West Virginia			SD, E		

Wisconsin		X			
Wyoming	X			X	
Total (Students with Disabilities)	14	25	8	14	
Total (English Learners)	14	25	1	14	

Table 2. Details and Specifications: States' Noise Reduction Accessibility Policies

State	Details/Specifications
Alaska	**Universal Feature:** Headphones: Student may wear noise blocking headphones to screen out extraneous sounds. This does not include music devices. Audio Aids: Audio aids include amplification devices, noise buffers, and white noise machines. These tools can be provided by the school or by the student. These tools are generally appropriate only if the student typically uses such devices during instruction or assessment, and they must be compatible with the requirements of the test. For example, noise reducing headphones must still allow the student to hear test items that are read aloud by a test administrator or presented as recorded audio. Considerations for Online Testing: If the headphones and headset required for testing are not compatible with a personal audio amplification device, such as a hearing aid or cochlear implants, test the student individually in a separate room and use the speakers in the testing device or external speakers.
Arizona	**Universal Feature:** AASA and AzSCI Universal Test Administration Conditions include: Wearing noise buffers after the scripted directions from the Test Administration Directions manual have been read.
California	**Designated Feature:** Noise Buffers: A student can use a noise buffer such as ear mufflers, white noise, or other equipment to block external sounds.
Colorado	**Designated Feature:** Noise Buffers: Noise cancelling headphones, earplugs, or other noise buffers not connected to any audio device are allowed. Note: Check noise buffer compatibility with auditory presentation modes (e.g., text-to-speech) prior to testing

Connecticut	**Designated Feature:** Noise Buffer: Ear mufflers, white noise, whisper phone, or other equipment may be used to block external sounds. A student (not groups of students) wears equipment to reduce environmental noises. Students may use these supports if they are regularly used during instruction. Students who use noise buffers will need headphones unless tested individually in a separate setting.
Delaware	**Designated Feature:** Noise Buffers: Ear mufflers, white noise, or other equipment used to block external sounds.
District of Columbia	**Designated Feature:** Headphones or Noise Buffers: The student uses headphones or noise buffers to minimize distraction, access embedded text-to-speech, or filter external noise during testing (in addition to when headphones are required for the ELA/literacy assessment). If headphones are used only as noise buffers, do not plug them into the testing device.
Florida	**Accommodation:** Flexible Setting: Special acoustics, such as FM systems, may be used to enhance sound, or special rooms or noise canceling headphones may be used to decrease auditory distractions. White noise/sound machines or music that are approved by district/school coordinators may be used to reduce auditory distractions. During testing, machines and music players must be controlled by the test administrator or proctor.
Georgia	**Accommodation:** Presentation accommodation: Audio amplification noise buffers and cancelling devices, headphones, or other listening devices. Setting accommodation for students who are deaf or hard of hearing: Change location to increase physical access (e.g., minimize background noise, face student when speaking, speak to student and not to interpreter, and increase wait time for interpreter to finish).
Hawaii	**Designated Feature:** Noise Buffers: Ear mufflers, white noise, or other equipment used to block external sounds. Student (not groups of students) wears equipment to reduce environmental noises. Students may have these testing variations if regularly used in the classroom. Students who use noise buffers will need headphones unless tested individually in a separate setting.

Idaho	**Designated Feature:** Noise Buffers: Ear mufflers, white noise, or other equipment used to block external sounds. Student (not groups of students) wears equipment to reduce environmental noises. Students may have these testing variations if regularly used in the classroom. Students who use noise buffers will need headphones unless tested individually in a separate setting.
Illinois	**Designated Feature:** Headphones or Noise Buffers: The student uses headphones or noise buffers to minimize distraction, access embedded Text-to-Speech, or filter external noise during testing (in addition to when headphones are required for the ELA/literacy assessment). If headphones are used only as noise buffers, do not plug them into the testing device.
Indiana	**Universal Feature:** Headphones or Noise Buffers: Headphones or noise buffers may be used to block out distractions. Headphones may not be connected to a device (e.g., a phone or the testing device) and may not play music, white noise, or other audio tracks. Students may provide their own headphones for testing
Iowa	**Universal Feature:** Noise Buffer: The student uses approved noise buffers to minimize distraction or filter external noise during testing.
Louisiana	**Universal Feature:** Headphones or Noise Buffers: Students use headphones or noise buffers to minimize distraction or filter external noise during testing. If headphones are used only as noise buffers, they should not be plugged into the testing device.
Maine	**Designated Feature (ELA, Math):** Examples of supports that can be provided to students and do not need to be indicated in the assessment platform include: Auditory devices (e.g., special acoustics, amplification, noise buffers, whisper phones, calming music). **Designated Feature (Science):** Alternate Aids/Supports: The test may be presented through their regular communication system to a student who uses alternative or assistive technology on a daily basis. The test may be presented using visual aids such as visual magnification devices, reduction of visual print by blocking or other techniques, acetate shields; or auditory devices such as special acoustics, amplification, noise buffers, whisper phones, or calming music.

Maryland	**Designated Feature:** Headphones or Noise Buffers: A student uses a noise buffer to minimize distraction or to filter external noise in order to maintain focus. The student uses headphones or noise buffers to minimize distraction, access embedded text-to-speech, or filter external noise during testing (in addition to when headphones are required for the ELA/literacy assessment). If headphones are used only as noise buffers, do not plug them into the testing device.
Massachusetts	**Designated Feature:** Noise buffer, such as noise-canceling earmuffs/headphones or white noise (Note: music or other recordings may *not* be played, unless granted as a *unique accommodation* by DESE.)
Michigan	**Designated Feature:** Noise Buffers (ear mufflers, white noise, and/or other equipment to block external sounds): Noise buffers are appropriate for the small number of students who need to wear equipment to reduce environmental noise. Students may have this support if they regularly use such equipment in the classroom. Students will need headphones for this support unless they are tested individually in a separate setting.
Minnesota	**General Supports Available for All Students (Universal Feature):** Music or Noise Buffers: Music and noise buffers provided by the district may be used, but only by students who have used them in instructional or other assessment settings. Noise buffers (white noise) reduce noise distractions for the student taking the test. Noise buffers may include individual study carrels, headsets, earplugs, and individual portable buffers set on the student's desk, or an audio player that generates white noise or instrumental music. Note: A white noise accessibility feature is available for the online MCA; refer to Tools in online assessments above. • Noise buffers or instrumental music are provided at an individual level, not to an entire group on the assumption that all will benefit. The noise buffer or instrumental music can be accessed through headphones or in an individual setting. • Individuals must be able to control the on/off function and volume. • Audio players must be school owned, and the audio must be provided by the school. Headphones: Headphones are recommended for online Reading MCA because text-to-speech is available for the directions at the beginning of the test as well as for the white noise accessibility feature available throughout the test.
Mississippi	**Universal Feature:** Distraction and stress minimizers (e.g., noise-cancelling headphones/earplugs, stress ball)

Missouri	**Administrative Considerations (Universal Feature):** Noise Buffers (Earmuffs, white noise, etc.)
Montana	**Designated Feature:** Noise Buffers: Ear mufflers, white noise, or other equipment used to block external sounds. Student (not groups of students) wears equipment to reduce environmental noises. Students may have these testing variations if regularly used in the classroom. Students who use noise buffers will need headphones unless tested individually in a separate setting.
Nebraska	**Universal Feature:** Noise Buffer/Headphones: The student uses noise buffers to minimize distraction or filter external noise during testing. Any noise buffer must be compatible with the requirements of the test. Any headphones may be used but may not be plugged into a digital source. Students easily distracted during classroom activities requiring the student to focus for longer periods of time.
Nevada	**Designated Feature:** Noise Buffers: Ear mufflers, white noise, or other equipment used to block external sounds. Student (not groups of students) wears equipment to reduce environmental noises. Students may have these testing variations if regularly used in the classroom. Students who use noise buffers will need headphones unless tested individually in a separate setting.
New Hampshire	**Designated Feature:** Noise Buffers: Ear mufflers, white noise, or other equipment used to block external sounds. Student (not groups of students) wears equipment to reduce environmental noises. Students may have these testing variations if regularly used in the classroom. Students who use noise buffers will need headphones unless tested individually in a separate setting.
New Jersey	**Designated Feature:** Headphones or Noise Buffers: The student uses headphones or noise buffers to minimize distraction, access embedded text-to-speech, or filter external noise during testing (in addition to when headphones are required for the ELA assessment). If headphones are used only as noise buffers, do not plug them into the testing device.
New Mexico	**Accommodation:** Headphones as Noise Buffer: The student uses headphones or noise buffers to minimize distraction or filter external noise during testing. If headphones are used only as noise buffers, they should not be plugged into the student's device.

New York	**Accommodation:** Testing Accommodations for Special Populations (Students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing): Special acoustics (e.g., minimal extraneous noises)
North Carolina	**Designated Feature:** Noise-Cancelling Headphones and Ear Plugs: Headphones and ear plugs reduce unwanted ambient and low frequency sounds. Headphones must not be connected to any device by either a wired connection or wirelessly (e.g., Bluetooth).
North Dakota	**Accessibility Feature (Designated Feature):** Noise buffer/Headphones/Audio Aids: The student uses noise buffers to minimize distraction or to filter out external noise during testing. Any noise buffer must be compatible with the hardware requirements and the test platform.
Ohio	**Designated Feature:** Music or White Noise: A student or group of students listens to background music or white noise during testing. The test administrator may play music to a student or group of students, or a student may use a teacher-provided device and earbuds. Music selections should be free of any test content specific lyrics. Test security must be maintained. Students may not use personal devices (for example, cell phone and MP3 player). Additional information about the electronic device policy is in the OST Test Administration Manual. Noise Buffers: The student uses headphones, earbuds or earplugs to minimize distraction or filter external noise during testing. If students use headphones or earbuds as noise buffers, they should not be plugged into a device. When using noise buffers, the student must be able to hear the test administrator.
Oklahoma	**Accommodation:** Noise Buffers: Use of aids or assistive technology (AT) devices or supports (e.g., color overlays, magnifier, pencil grips, auditory amplification devices, noise buffers, wedge for positioning, and multiplication table/chart, hundreds chart). If you are marking this accommodation, please also include it under Supplementary aids on the IEP. The specific device or support should be specified in the IEP/504 Plan, be routinely used by the student, and not alter the construct being measured.

Oregon	**Designated Feature:** Noise Buffers: Ear mufflers, white noise, or other equipment used to block external sounds. The student uses noise buffering equipment to manage environmental noises. Any noise buffer must be compatible with the requirements of the test (e.g., allow the student to hear listening items). Students may have these testing variations if regularly used in the classroom. Students who use noise buffers will need headphones unless tested individually in a separate setting.
Pennsylvania	**Accommodation:** Noise Canceling Headphones: Some students benefit from wearing noise buffers to minimize distraction and maximize concentration. The headphones/earplugs may not be connected to Bluetooth or any other connection that may allow for information to be conveyed to the student during the assessment.
Rhode Island	**Accessibility Feature (Universal Feature):** Adaptive or Specialized Equipment or Furniture: Some students may require specialized equipment or furniture including (but not limited to) special seating, weighted vests, fidget tools, noise-reducing headphones, specialized lighting or acoustics, or adaptive keyboards, desks, or lighting. Auditory Supports: Amplification. Volume control, amplification device, FM system, noise buffer, noise-cancelling earmuffs/headphones, white noise machine.
South Carolina	**Universal Feature:** Audio Aids: Audio Aids include amplification devices, noise buffers, non-Bluetooth headphones, noise canceling headphones (non-Bluetooth) or ear plugs. • The student uses an amplification device typically used during instruction. • The student uses a noise buffer (e.g., headphones, earbuds, ear plugs) to minimize distraction or filter external noise during testing. Any noise buffer must be compatible with the requirements of the assessment.
South Dakota	**Designated Feature:** Noise Buffers: Ear mufflers, white noise, or other equipment used to block external sounds. For use by students who are distracted by external noises in the testing environment. Student (not groups of students) wears equipment to reduce environmental noises. Students may have these testing variations if regularly used in the classroom. Noise buffers used during testing should not interfere with the testing of other students. Headphones may be needed unless tested individually in a separate setting.

Tennessee	**Universal Feature:** Auditory Aids: The student uses amplification device assistive technology (e.g., FM System), noise buffers, or white noise machine provided by the student or by the school. The student should continue to use the same auditory aides during assessment as required during daily instruction. Music is not permitted to be played during the assessment. If headphones are used only as noise buffers, they should not be plugged into a device.
Texas	**Designated Feature:** Assistive Technology: Focus and Attention Supports • A student uses noise-reducing headphones during a test administration. • A student places his phone or other device on his desk to listen to instrumental music, ambient sounds, or white noise using headphones or Bluetooth earbuds. Because the phone is on the student's desk, the test administrator is able to monitor phone use. Note: It is recommended that the audio be downloaded to the device prior to testing so the device may be locked in a mode that does not risk compromising test security (https://txassessmentdocs.atlassian.net/wiki/spaces/ODCCM/pages/2793212784).
Utah	**Universal Feature:** Minimize Distractions: Some students need help reducing distractions and/or maintaining focus while they are accessing and interacting with information presented during instruction or assessment. A student may wear noise buffers, such as earphones, earplugs, or headphones to reduce distractions and improve concentration. Study carrels may also be used.
Vermont	**Designated Feature:** Noise Buffers: Test administrator provides students with headphones. Locally provided supports may be offered to muffle or block external noise.
Virginia	**Accommodation:** Noise Dampening Equipment: A student with a disability may wear noise dampening headphones, ear muffs, or ear plugs to reduce distractions while taking a Growth assessment or SOL test. A Hearing Aids with Internet-Connected Device Form must be submitted to the VDOE for students with disabilities who require hearing aids that need a connection to an Internet-enabled device, such as a phone or tablet, during the administration of a VAP test.

Washington	**Designated Feature:** Noise Buffers: Ear mufflers, white noise, or other equipment used to block external sounds. Student wears equipment to reduce environmental noises. Students may have these testing variations if regularly used in the classroom. Students who use noise buffers will need headphones unless tested individually in a separate setting. This option should be based on a student's individual needs and should not be applied on a group basis.
West Virginia	**Accommodation (Students with Disabilities):** Noise Buffers: Ear mufflers, white noise, or other equipment used to block external sounds. Student (not groups of students) wears equipment to reduce environmental noises. Students may have these testing variations if regularly used in the classroom. Students who use noise buffers will need headphones unless tested individually in a separate setting. **Accommodation (English Learners):** Noise Buffer: The student uses noise buffers to minimize distraction or filter external noise during testing. Noise buffer must allow the student to hear listening items. Students who are distracted by external noises within the testing environment may need noise buffers (e.g., mufflers, student spacing).
Wisconsin	**Designated Feature:** Noise Buffers: Ear mufflers (e.g., noise cancelling headphones) or white noise used to block external sounds. Student (not groups of students) wears equipment to reduce environmental noises. Students may be provided with noise buffers if regularly used in the classroom. Students who use white noise will need headphones unless tested individually in a separate setting.
Wyoming	**Universal Feature:** Noise Buffers: Student wears equipment to reduce environmental noises. Students may have these testing variations if regularly used in the classroom. Noise buffers used during testing should not interfere with the testing of other students. Headphones may be needed unless tested individually in a separate setting.

Footnotes

- **[1]**
  States' accessibility policies on noise reduction were obtained through the examination and analysis of publicly available information, including accommodations manuals or other policy documents, on state department of education websites. The policies were gathered from states' websites between August and October 2023.The information in the tables from each state was coded based on information in the state policy.

- **[2]**
  Universal Features are available to all students as they access instructional or assessment content. *Designated Features* are available to any student as long as an educator (or team of educators, with student and parent input) indicates that they would be helpful given the student's characteristics and needs. *Accommodations* are changes in procedures or materials ensure equitable access to instructional and assessment content and generate valid assessment results for students who need them. Accommodations are generally available to students for whom there is documentation on an individualized education program (IEP) or 504 accommodations plan; some states also have offered accommodations to English learners.

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